

**STATEMENT**

*of*

**THE HONORABLE KAREN J. ANDERSON**

MAYOR OF MINNETONKA, MINNESOTA

*on behalf of*

**THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES**

*before the*

**GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE**

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY POLICY, NATURAL RESOURCES AND  
REGULATORY AFFAIRS

*and*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*on*

**“U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY:  
CONSOLIDATION AND CO-LOCATION OF REGIONAL AND FIELD  
OFFICES”**

March 24, 2004

Chairmen Ose and Shays and Members of the Subcommittees, the National League of Cities (NLC) is pleased to have this opportunity to share its position on the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to reorganize its structure for the regional and field offices of more than 22 agencies that were merged into the new Department, under the Homeland Security Act of 2002. I am Karen J. Anderson, Mayor of Minnetonka, Minnesota, Past President of the National League of Cities, and a member of the Department of Homeland Security's State and Local Senior Advisory Committee.

The National League of Cities is the nation's oldest and largest association representing municipal interests in Washington. NLC's membership includes more than 17,000 cities and towns across the country, with over 135,000 mayors and local elected officials.

At this time, I ask that my written testimony be submitted for the record, and that any supplemental information requested will be added as soon as possible.

On behalf of NLC, I would like to express my gratitude to you, Mr. Chairmen, for your efforts to ensure that municipal governments are involved as equal stakeholders in these decisions to reorganize regional and field offices. Your leadership on this issue clearly shows your commitment to ensuring that federal resources are available to our first responders and communities to strengthen the nation's capacity for an integrated homeland security and emergency preparedness system.

The Department's initial report, submitted on February 4, regarding the consolidation effort focused mainly on real estate and facilities planning, rather than improved service delivery to local governments. NLC strongly encourages the Department to consider the following factors in its plans for consolidation and co-location, which would be consistent with the intent of Section 706 of the Homeland Security Act.

### **Benefits of Field Office Consolidation/Co-location**

First, the co-location of field offices within a municipality will improve the ability of all organizations involved in homeland security to prevent and respond to natural disasters and homeland security emergencies. Creating a centralized location for field offices of the Secret Service, customs, immigration, border and transportation security, emergency preparedness and response, and related agencies will improve access to information, ensure coordination of planning and preparedness efforts, and provide efficiency in response times during an emergency.

For example, having a centralized office located near an emergency operations center, local law enforcement agency, or similar facility helps build the strong relationships needed between federal and local authorities before a disaster strikes. Co-location should foster a greater level of trust and cooperation, which in turn should improve the exchange of intelligence to help prevent threats to homeland security.

Also, planning for a major event within a city or town will be much more comprehensive where the field office could provide a “one-stop-shop” with all relevant agencies involved.

As cities and towns implement mutual aid agreements necessary to maximize resources to first responders, conduct vulnerability assessments, or engage in first responder preparedness exercises and training programs, the expertise of the consolidated field offices is necessary. Since the September 11 attacks, we all realize that in order to improve domestic preparedness efforts, federal resources and critical information for crisis and consequence management to supplement our first responders are essential. Our local police, firefighters, EMS, public health authorities, and other responders are the first to arrive at the scene of a disaster. In many instances, federal resources are not available until hours afterwards. Having a centralized office within a municipality with the authority to quickly garner the supplemental resources needed during a catastrophe, and perform the on-site coordination among federal agencies, is paramount to improved readiness and response capabilities.

A good example of a one-stop-shop for public safety and emergency response needs is Minnesota's State Duty Officer. Within the Minnesota Department of Public Safety is a 24 hour/seven day-a-week, one-point-of-contact for state notification and assistance for emergency response. The State Duty Officer is available to local officials to determine the appropriate state agency to respond and to help identify the location of resources needed in an emergency. This model, when applied to the consolidation of field offices, could provide a one-point-of-contact in the regional or field office to determine the appropriate federal agency and identify the federal resources available to assist in an emergency.

We also realize that, in some situations, having everyone under one roof is not going to be a magic answer. In Minneapolis/St. Paul, the majority of federal departments are located in the Minneapolis or St. Paul federal buildings. If they are not in one of these two buildings, they are in leased real estate due to space needs. To try to find real estate to place all offices in one location might be more costly and less efficient. For these reasons, the establishment of a primary field office or reliance on telecommunications to establish a virtual co-location of state and local emergency organizations may be a better approach.

### **Strengthened Communications**

Secondly, improving the flow of information among DHS, state homeland security agencies, county emergency management agencies, and municipal governments is key. In this regard, NLC would encourage the creation of local task forces for the reorganization of each field office. It is a good-government approach to ensure that the concerns of all stakeholders are addressed collectively and proactively. Involving municipal governments at the beginning of this consolidation process will promote intergovernmental coordination, and will be more cost effective.

This will provide local elected officials and our first responders with an opportunity to discuss what areas are working well and review alternatives to existing challenges.

One illustration of this point is the activation of Orange Alert levels for heightened security. Several local officials have stated that there is ambiguity about what protective measures a locality should implement during an Orange Alert and which federal agency is the main point-of-contact during these periods. Centralized field offices can help coordinate and implement the appropriate response to these heightened alerts and ensure the delivery of federal resources, when needed. The field offices could also serve as the point-of-contact for questions about reimbursement expenses for critical infrastructure protection during Orange Alerts as well. The Department of Homeland Security recently extended its deadline to process reimbursement requests for the Orange Alert that occurred between December 21, 2003 and January 9, 2004 because several local governments were neither aware that the reimbursement process was available, nor aware of which appropriate agency to contact.

Centralized field offices can also provide the technical assistance that is needed to help jurisdictions administer homeland security grants. There are gaps in communication among state and local governments in this regard about what funding is available and how it can be used in accordance with statewide homeland security plans. The field offices can encourage coordinated planning, procurement, and implementation efforts to ensure the best use of resources for prevention and preparedness.

### **Best Practices**

The Department must also continue to promote information on “best practices” for homeland security that can be shared through all available resources. Several initiatives are underway by federal agencies and associations to develop and promulgate best practices and lessons learned. However, these disparate efforts have not systematically reached all the stakeholders involved in homeland security efforts at the local, state and federal levels of government.

The Homeland Security Advisory Committee, NLC, and other entities have recommended the establishment of a clearinghouse of information on best practices for homeland security. NLC has been sharing best practices related to homeland security among our members for two years. This knowledgebase, as well as best practices within other organizations, should be universally accessible through DHS, regional offices, and field offices. As the Department moves to implement its new National Incident Management System (NIMS) and National Response Plan (NRP), information about training, mutual aid agreements, all-hazards planning, interoperability of equipment and first responder communications, and related topics should be readily available to all involved in homeland security.

## **All-Hazards Planning**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), now known as the Emergency Preparedness and Response Directorate of the Department, has established an effective model that can serve as the basis for improving response and coordination of services within the new centralized field offices. In Minnesota, for example, we know that we must be prepared to respond to natural disasters, such as tornadoes. In this regard, DHS must continue to support the all-hazards approach within coordinated homeland security operations to respond to natural disasters as well as unforeseen, and unfortunate, consequences of terrorism. Natural disasters and mitigation efforts will remain a fact-of-life for all local governments. Therefore, the role of FEMA's regional offices should not be diminished in this reorganization, but strengthened, with the cross-training of personnel and increased outreach to local governments--both first responders and elected officials.

Finally, NLC encourages Congress and the Department to ensure that there are enough resources and flexibility in the consolidation process to accommodate the unique needs of each local jurisdiction. As many of us are aware, using a one-size-fits-all approach to disaster preparedness and mitigation is not the most successful way to improve homeland security. A careful analysis is needed to ensure that efforts to achieve consolidation and co-location do not create an added level of bureaucracy.

The country -- especially now -- needs the assurance that our homeland security operation is coordinated and effective. We congratulate Secretary Ridge and his staff on the progress made within one year of the Department's inception, and appreciate the many challenges that still lie ahead. To continue this progress at the local level, however, we need stronger partnerships, collaborative problem solving, and enhanced communication to ensure that the field offices are effective in providing the support needed.

Mr. Chairmen and Members of the Subcommittees, the National League of Cities greatly appreciates your leadership on this issue. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues, the Department of Homeland Security, our first responders, and other stakeholders to ensure that the reorganization of field offices will help maximize the resources available to cities and towns. We must continue to build a national system for domestic preparedness that is flexible enough to prevent and respond to all types of emergencies. Local homeland security field offices are a fundamental part of this national/local strategy.

I would be happy to answer any questions that the Subcommittees may have at the appropriate time.

Thank you.